

February 28, 2021

To the Legislative Representatives of Connecticut,

My name is Laura Consiglio and I have been a resident of New Fairfield, CT for nearly 22 years. I write you in support of House Bill 6517, to create necessary frameworks, guidance, and accountability to support dyslexia legislation implementation.

Many parents send their children to school expecting that the teachers they encounter will be the experts in all things educational. Unfortunately, when it comes to dyslexia, that is generally not the case. Even though our child received an early diagnosis that we obtained privately, the teachers in our public schools did not have the knowledge, experience, or training to appropriately address his learning differences. Although IEP's were developed annually, his teachers did not have the skills or exposure to provide adequate interventions.

In our case, our child was provided an IEP as 1st grade started. Despite the consistent "interventions" provided by the public school, our child was still three years behind grade level reading at the end of 5th grade. Imagine the frustration of receiving specialized services and being separated from your peers and still feeling you are stupid? That is how so many of these students perceive themselves. During the 5th grade PPT meeting, a newly certified "reading specialist" recommended a decrease from daily, 45-minute reading classes to just two, 30-minute sessions per week for our child to enter middle school. This child had not mastered reading goals in three years, yet this "specialist" was sure we could decrease services. A reading tutor was brought in the following year but did not believe our child had dyslexia because "in her mind, dyslexics can't read." Her opinions did not align with scientific research-based evidence. In hindsight, a decrease in these types of services would have been fine since they were neither appropriate nor effective in achieving adequate progress. These failures impact a child's self-esteem in addition to causing even more of an achievement gap with their peers. Had our child received appropriate interventions when first identified, there is every reason to believe that he would have been successful with reading and no longer required specialized instructional services in middle school.

Structured literacy is beneficial for all students but imperative for students with dyslexia. Our teachers need to have the appropriate tools and training to address and recognize nearly 20% of their students. However, it is not enough for the state to "recognize the need" or suggest guidelines for dyslexia teacher training. Districts must be required to implement these programs with fidelity, remain compliant, and be held accountable for failing to do so with swift consequences imposed by the State DOE. These programs are not something that can be taught in a brief teacher in-service but must be imbedded in the educator preparation programs while ensuring that out-of-state applicants are also held to the same rigorous standards. There must be stringent, rigorous, and consistent requirements to earn the certification of Reading Specialist.

We made the decision that our child attend a private school, with an imbedded program for language-based learning disabilities. This withdrawal from the CT public school system and subsequent intervention in a private setting was his turning point. The child who was floundering and hated school is currently a high school junior achieving high honors. This simply would not have been possible on the path the public school was proposing.

Because of our experiences with the public school system in CT, I have used the knowledge gained to assist others in the greater Danbury area facing similar challenges advocating for their children. We are not alone in these frustrations and the experiences.

It is unacceptable that Connecticut cannot provide a free appropriate public education for all students, no matter the district, town, or city. It is worse still that only those students with parents and/or guardians familiar with dyslexia are even aware of the significant challenges their children face due to this learning difference, and even a smaller percentage of those parents/guardians who can regularly and routinely fight their districts for appropriate services.

Please vote in support of House Bill 6517 to benefit the students of Connecticut.

Sincerely,

Laura Consiglio
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